



**WATERSHED  
FACT PACK**

# COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE

Tools for Building Partnerships and  
Sharing Your Watershed Success Stories





# Introduction

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Individuals and organizations throughout Pennsylvania have emerged as leaders in promoting a watershed approach to natural resource management. Through partnerships, dedication, and hard work, they are taking steps to restore, enhance, and protect our watershed resources. They are monitoring water quality in local streams, restoring streambanks, conducting watershed assessments, educating the public, and taking part in a host of other valuable activities.

Local watershed restoration and protection projects are group efforts. One invaluable element of watershed management is its dependence on cooperative partnerships. Partnerships need people and dedication.

To fully realize the potential of watershed management, the participants in a project need to constantly reach out to new partners to educate them about the benefits of their work. They need to communicate their message.

Potential audiences include new volunteers; funders, such as foundation staff; local businesses; educators and researchers; and elected and appointed municipal, state, and federal officials.

This fact pack will help watershed groups and other citizen organizations engaged in local environmental protection realize the value of reaching out to new partners and provide tips for how to do so. Each watershed is different, and each project is unique. Indeed, the value of a watershed approach is that it is tailored to individual circumstances. But there are common themes for how to communicate your message that carry from one watershed to another.

Please use this fact pack as a menu. The various suggestions and lists can all be helpful in getting the word out about your project. Some of the ideas overlap, yet they all reinforce each other.

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This fact pack was produced by the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR) in cooperation with Greenworks.tv. Please visit [www.greenworks.tv](http://www.greenworks.tv) to learn more about Greenworks and to view a video that gives additional tips for how to effectively communicate your message.

To order additional copies of this booklet or a compact disk that contains both a copy of the text and the video, please contact POWR at [info@pawatersheds.org](mailto:info@pawatersheds.org) or (717) 234-7910 or visit [www.pawatersheds.org](http://www.pawatersheds.org). Feel free to call with additional questions about how to effectively communicate your message. This document may be reproduced in part or entirely with complete credit given to POWR and the publication. Please contact POWR before reproducing large quantities.

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## Why Communicate Your Message?

Local groups tend to get involved with watershed protection because they love the resource and enjoy the work they are doing to protect it. They get excited about a project and put their hearts and souls into their work. But sometimes they forget to, have no interest in, or do not understand why they should tell others about what they are doing. This can be a critical oversight.

Communicating your message can be easy, and it can yield substantial rewards. The following are a few ways that communicating your message will enhance the viability of your local projects.

- ✓ Reach out to **new partners**.

Attract new **members** and **volunteers** – the lifeblood of local environmental stewardship efforts.

- ✓ Promote the projects to **potential funders**, including foundation and agency staff, businesses, and individuals.



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*Find others to help  
navigate your project.*

## Why Communicate Your Message?

Projects cost money, and getting the word out will increase the visibility of your work among organizations and individuals who can help you cover your expenses.

- ✓ Educate **public officials** about the benefits of local projects and the watershed approach.

Let them know why your project is important to the community and how specific government programs help you to accomplish your goals.

Explain why the public officials should care about your project and why they should support programs and policies that make your work possible.

- ✓ Give those involved with the project the **credit** they deserve.

Acknowledging the work of your partners will enhance the **legitimacy** of their work and give them a sense of ownership.

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*Build your team.*



## Crafting Effective Messages

Regardless of your specific situation, a few key principles apply to making a compelling case for your work. The following tips will help you craft effective messages.



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*Make your  
project shine.*

- ✓ Be clear about your **goals**.

Know what you are trying to accomplish by communicating your message.

- ✓ Determine the **audience** you are trying to reach.

Are you reaching out to volunteers, the community, elected officials, or others?

- ✓ Be **positive**.

Focus on the good things you are doing, not the bad events that led to local problems.

- ✓ Determine why your audience should care about your issue.

What are their **concerns**?

## Crafting Effective Messages

What core **values** in your audience do these concerns speak to?

- ✓ Keep your message **simple**.

Be able to articulate your message in a few sentences.

- ✓ Use **language** that your audience understands.

Do not be too technical.

- ✓ Think about who would be an effective **messenger** for your audience.

The choice of messenger will depend on the message and target audience.

Do you have a board member who might know a local elected official and be able to talk about the need for continued funding?

Could schoolchildren help describe your educational program to community members?

- ✓ Be prepared to use **anecdotes**.

Think of interesting events that happened at or as a result of your project.

Add some human interest to amplify your message.

- ✓ Use **images** to tell your story, but know your **facts** and have them handy.

## Crafting Effective Messages

Use before-and-after photographs of your project site, and pass along some simple facts about the project.

- ✓ Transform your message into a **slogan**.

Try to come up with a simple message that communicates the theme you are trying to convey.

- ✓ Determine **points of access** to get your message to your target audience.

What opportunities do you have for face-to-face meetings?

How could you use the local media?



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*Make your audience want to see for themselves.*

## Strengthening Local Networks

Local environmental projects benefit more than just the people directly involved with them. The positive impacts are felt throughout the community and downstream in the watershed. Other people and organizations can be advocates for your project and the policies and funding streams that support your work. Here are some ways to build and strengthen local networks in support of your work.

- ✓ **Educate** your local community about the **benefits** of your project.

Create a **fact sheet** about the project that details its benefits to the area.

Use specific examples and interesting information.

- ✓ **Recognize** and **thank** your partners.

Thank them often.

Tell the public about their contributions.

- ✓ Collect and maintain **contact information** for your partners.

Periodically pass around lists of names, e-mails, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers and ask people to make sure their information is correct.

- ✓ Conduct a **field day** for the community to come learn about your project.

## Strengthening Local Networks

- ✓ Pass around **sign-in sheets** at your meetings and events to keep a current list of people who have shown an interest in your work.

- ✓ Involve the **media**.

Meet with local newspaper editorial boards or television and radio news departments.

Invite the media to your events.

Create sample letters to the editor for your members to submit that describe the benefits of your work.

- ✓ Reach out to **public officials**.

Describe the **benefits** of your project and how they are made possible because of a specific policy, program, or funding stream.

Stress the **partnerships** you have formed and the **matching funds** you have been able to attract.



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*Plant the seed for  
future partnerships.*

## Strengthening Local Networks

Meet with legislators in their district offices.

Invite local, state, and federal officials to your events.

Create sample letters to send to public officials that describe the benefits of your work.

- ✓ Identify influential **businesses** and **other organizations** in your community and educate them about your work.

Tell them how your work benefits them.

Ask them to become a partner.

- ✓ Maintain contact with **statewide** and **national organizations** working in your field to keep informed of events outside your watershed.

Subscribe to electronic and print newsletters.

Attend conferences and other events.

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*Let your partners  
test the waters.*



## Showcasing Your Projects

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then an in-person event is worth a million. There is no more effective way to educate someone about your project or to get them excited about what you are doing than to invite them to see what you are doing first-hand.

- ✓ Identify your **audience**.

Figure out whom you are trying to reach with your event.

- ✓ Strategically pick a **date** and **time** for the event.

Time it to precede or to coincide with an important decision or debate within your local government, the state legislature, or federal policy process.

Make sure the date and time are good for your audience.

Pick a date that will likely have good weather and will not conflict with other events.

- ✓ Structure the event to inform people about how your project **benefits the community**.
- ✓ Give attendees **something to do** at the event.

Teach them how to do plantings or sample water quality, and let them try it themselves.

If they will be asked to participate, tell them what to wear (e.g., clothes they do not mind getting dirty; work gloves).

## Showcasing Your Projects

- ✓ Invite your **partners**.
- ✓ Invite **public officials** such as borough council members, township supervisors, county commissioners, state senators and representatives, members of Congress, and legislative and agency staff.

Structure the event to portray the officials in a positive way.



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*Involve your audience.*

- ✓ Send out a **media advisory** one week before the event.

Tell the media about your event.

- ✓ **Publicize** the event.

Submit materials to local daily and weekly newspapers.

Put up posters at public meeting places around the community (e.g., at public libraries; grocery stores)

## Showcasing Your Projects

- ✓ **Call reporters** to whom you sent the media advisory the day before the event.

Tell them who will be in attendance.

Encourage them to take pictures and interview officials at the event.

- ✓ Keep it **positive**.

Do not use the event as an excuse to complain.

- ✓ Create a **fact sheet** about the project.

Describe the benefits of the project.

List your partners.

Describe matching funds and in-kind services that were contributed.

Include contact information for your group.-

### **At the event . . .**

- ✓ Make it **fun** and **memorable**.
- ✓ **Thank** everyone for coming at the beginning and at the end of the event.
- ✓ Have a *sign-in sheet* to collect contact information.
- ✓ Distribute **fact sheets**.

## Showcasing Your Projects

### After the event . . .

- ✓ **Thank** (in writing) as many people as possible for coming to the event, especially elected officials, potential funders, and new partners.
- ✓ Send copies of **photographs** and homemade or professional **certificates** to elected officials who attended the event.
- ✓ **Evaluate** what went well and what did not go well at the event, write it down, and use that information when **planning** your next event.



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*Make it fun!*

## Meeting with Public Officials

Public officials are important to local watershed projects in many ways. For example, municipal, state, and federal officials and agency staff can provide on-the-ground technical assistance and help to generate funding support. Officials who understand and embrace the value of your work can introduce watershed concepts to local, state, and federal policy processes and, in so doing, promote the concepts underlying your work on a broader scale.

- ✓ Invite your **partners to accompany you** on a visit with the public officials.

Having key partners attend the meeting with you sends a signal about the broad support for your project.

- ✓ Schedule meetings with officials in their **district offices**.

While you can meet with elected officials in Harrisburg or Washington, DC, the most intimate setting is in their district offices.

- ✓ **Plan** before the meeting.

Talk to your partners before the meeting.

Create an outline of what you want to say.

Plan for the meeting to last about thirty minutes, but be prepared to either boil your message down if time is short or to be able to say more if time permits.

- ✓ Be prepared to meet with a **staff person** if an elected official is not available to meet with you.

## Meeting with Public Officials

Do not be discouraged if you meet with a staff member rather than the official.

Know that elected officials rely on staff members to keep them informed and that your message will get through.

- ✓ Prepare a small packet of **information** for the official.

Include a description of the **benefits** of your projects, **partnerships**, **matching funds** and **in-kind contributions**.

Include **contact information**.

Include an invitation to come to an event at your project site or one of your organizational meetings.

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*Break the ice and  
tell them what  
you're doing.*



## Meeting with Public Officials

- ✓ Be **clear**. Be **positive**. Be **brief**. Be **polite**.

Concentrate on two or three main ideas.

Do not use the meeting as an opportunity to complain.

- ✓ Say **“Thank you.”**

Thank the person for meeting with you, and thank them for their support.

- ✓ Write a follow-up **thank you note**.

Include reminders about upcoming events at your project site or future organizational meetings.



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*Ask them to come  
learn about your  
project.*

## Working with the Media

Newspapers, television, and radio offer an opportunity to reach large audiences. In particular, local and regional weekly newspapers are read cover-to-cover and can be a great way to publicize your events. Do not wait for the media to come to you; rather, reach out to media outlets to inform them about what you are doing, invite them to speak with you, and ask them to tour your project.

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*Tie the story  
to the community.*



- ✓ Get to know the potential **media outlets** in your area.

Daily, weekly, and college newspapers. Do not overlook the importance of **weekly newspapers**.

Magazines.

Community, organizational, school, and business newsletters.

Television and radio stations, including free community calendars.

## Working with the Media

- ✓ Identify and develop relationships with **key contacts** in the media.

For example, find out the environmental beat reporter for the major local newspaper.

Become a resource for them on matters related to your project.

- ✓ Meet with newspaper **editors**.

Educate them about your projects and issues that affect you.

- ✓ Pick a positive, out-going member of your group to be your **spokesperson** with the media.

Be enthusiastic about your project.

- ✓ **Localize** the story

Make it relevant to the community served by the media.

Link it to a current news story.

- ✓ Be **creative**.

Make the story interesting to readers, viewers, and listeners.

Show how it is unique.

## Working with the Media

- ✓ Be **timely** in your communication with the media.

Get your stories to them as soon as possible.

- ✓ Invite the media to **local events**.

Send out a media advisory a week before the event.

Call reporters the day before the event.

Provide directions to the event.

- ✓ After the event, **follow up** with the members of the media who did not attend.

Tell them what happened at the event.

Give them any hand-outs that you distributed.

- ✓ Send **interesting photographs** with **captions** to newspapers.

Include local people, but do not make the photos appear crowded.

Heads should appear no smaller than the size of a nickel in the photo.

Include the following information in the captions: who, what, when, where, and why.

Make sure names and titles are spelled correctly.

## Working with the Media

- ✓ Use **hand-made signs** at your events.  
Try to use simple messages of six words or less.
- ✓ Tell reporters about **future events**.
- ✓ After the event, **thank** reporters for coming, but do not try to tell them what to write.
- ✓ Write **press releases, letters to the editor, and op-ed pieces** (see next section).



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*Make it interesting.*

## How to Write a Press Release, Letter to the Editor, or Op-Ed

A **press release** is designed to provide newspapers and television and radio news departments with detailed information from which they can write an article or develop a story. A **letter to the editor** is usually limited to about 300 words and allows the author to take a stand on an issue. It should be well-researched and include information to support the author's position. An **op-ed** is a 600- to 900-word essay that appears opposite the editorial page and gives the author the chance to educate the public and advocate a strong position. Similar principles apply to writing all three pieces.

- ✓ Think about the **interests** of the public.

Why would the public be interested in the story?

- ✓ **Start** with your **key message**.

Begin with the most important information.

The lead sentence should tell the essence of your story.

The first paragraph should tell the reader who, what, when, where, why, and how.

- ✓ Keep it **simple** and **concise**.

Write for no higher than an eighth grade reading level.

Do not use jargon or clichés.

## How to Write a Press Release, Letter to the Editor, or Op-Ed

- ✓ Use **facts** and **figures** to support your main point.

Include information that will be relevant and understandable to the audience.

Make sure the data is accurate.

- ✓ Include a **date**, **title**, **contact person** or **author**, and **contact information**.

### *Sample Press Release Format*

#### **NEWS RELEASE**

Organization Name and Contact Information  
(Mailing Address)

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CONTACT:

(Include Person's Name, Title, and Phone #)

#### **TITLE (IN BOLD)**

Town or City (date/year of news release) –

**Note:** Use the principles above to write three to four succinct paragraphs detailing your event or project.

**For more information on this project  
(or event), contact:**

(Give complete Contact Person's information again, including phone, email and website, if applicable)

# Communicating Your Message

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## Photo Credits

### Cover

*clockwise l to r:*

T.L. Gettings, Wildlands Conservancy

Slippery Rock Creek – McConnell's Mill State Park – Tim Palmer

Ketchum River – Loyalsock Tributary – Tim Palmer

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T. L. Gettings, Wildlands Conservancy

**By communicating your message,  
you will get others to join you  
in your exciting watershed journeys.**



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